

New research highlights experiences of ambulance control workers

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Staff who coordinate emergency services for 999 calls to the ambulance service require support to reduce stress and sickness absence, new research has found.

A team of experts, including from St George's, University of London and the University of Surrey, interviewed dispatch staff, who work in ambulance control, sending paramedics to emergencies.

The research uncovered that while dispatchers find the job rewarding, they also report feeling overworked and undervalued compared to those on the 'front line'. The research was undertaken following concerns that ambulance control staff have levels of [sickness leave](#) at twice the national average.

Professor Tom Quinn, of St George's, University of London and Kingston University, said dispatcher's work in a highly unpredictable job, where they have no control.

"Dispatchers are faceless compared to the frontline staff, but they are a tribe of unsung heroes working in similar conditions to [air traffic controllers](#) and the public don't understand the importance of their job," he said.

"They may not be seen as 'heroes' like paramedics and firefighters, but they are the ones ensuring that appropriate medical care reaches people in emergencies, which ultimately saves lives."

The pressures of the role and increasing call volumes, combined with a lack of appropriate support or recovery time after shifts increased the risks of burnout, the research found.

There was also poor interpersonal relationships between dispatch and emergency crews, with a lack of structure to promote team building.

The study recommended implementing more opportunities for dispatchers, paramedics and emergency service crews to understand each other's job, including shadowing on shifts, to increase team cohesion.

It also recommended higher management support and recognition, as well as training.

More information: Astrid Coxon et al. 'You're never making just one decision': exploring the lived experiences of ambulance Emergency Operations Centre personnel, *Emergency Medicine Journal* (2016). [DOI: 10.1136/emmermed-2015-204841](https://doi.org/10.1136/emmermed-2015-204841)

Provided by St. George's University of London

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